

May 25, 2017 House Education Reform Committee

Testimony of

**Alicia Lewis Stillman
4109 Winterset Lane
West Bloomfield, MI 48323
248-568-8014**

My name is Alicia Stillman. I was raised in Bloomfield Hills, and then raised my family in West Bloomfield. I am married and have three children. Karly, now 25 is an alumni of The University of Michigan; Zachary, 21 is a senior at The University of Michigan; and Emily, my angel daughter was 19 when she died in 2013 from meningococcal disease – a vaccine preventable disease.

My daughter was protected with the quadrivalent meningococcal vaccine, which protected her against 4 of the 5 common serogroups – A, C, W and Y. She had not received the vaccine to protect her against the 5th serogroup – the one that actually accounts for up to 50% of the cases of the disease-MenB. Emily died from a vaccine preventable disease because that vaccine was not available in the United States at that time. I know had it been available, my daughter would have received it, thus protecting her from the hideous disease that savagely took her life.

As I stood sobbing, saying goodbye to my daughter on a cold February morning, I promised her that I would figure this all out. I felt that I had not done my job as a mother by protecting my child. When Emily died, she was blessed to be able to save 5 lives with 6 of her organs, and countless others with her bone and tissue. She was a hero.

After her death, I learned everything I could about vaccines. I wanted to prevent other mothers from living with the horrible heartbreak that I was now to live with for the rest of my life. I also learned a lot about organ and tissue transplantation. The people that were gifted with Emily's organs became a part of my family. They were now carrying a part of my daughter inside their bodies. They promised me they would take care of my baby. Being an organ recipient requires a very regimented lifestyle, complete with quite a bit of medication to prevent their own body from fighting against the new organ. Because of this, most recipients are medically unable to be vaccinated. They depend on the community around them to be healthy, safe, and protected so that they themselves remain healthy, safe and protected.

I am proud to live in Michigan – a State that adopted vaccination waiver reform to require parents to learn the facts before making a decision that affects their children. I believe this protects the parent from accidentally making a wrong decision with so much incorrect information floating around.

I understand that a parent still has the right to receive a waiver if that is their belief. I hope that when each parent makes that personal decision they consider not only their healthy child, but also the others in the community who may be medically unable to receive a vaccine. It certainly makes me feel better knowing when they make that decision they are receiving unbiased education from medical experts.

House Bills 4425 and 4426 were small steps forward to protect our communities. Lets not take steps backwards. Lets educate parents to make the decisions that are right for them, and for the community in which they live.